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Passport Services
Bureau of Consular Affairs
U.S. Department of State

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travel to

MEXICO

TRAVEL TO MEXICO

General

Mexicans are courteous, hospitable, and are extremely proud of their country's independence, history, unique culture, and rapid progress over the past 50 years. Americans who display courtesy toward Mexicans, such as attempting to use Spanish, usually receive courteous treatment in return.

U.S. citizens planning to visit Mexico, either for a short or a longer period of time, should be aware of the following regulations and suggestions in order to avoid inconvenience or serious difficulties while traveling.

Entry Requirements

U.S. citizens visiting Mexico solely for tourism, transit, or study for up to 180 days do not require a passport and visa. Some proof of U.S. citizenship, however, is required. A birth certificate or a voter's registration card is acceptable proof of U.S. citizenship. All Americans need a "tourist card" to enter and leave Mexico. Tourist cards are issued for a maximum of 90 days rather than the 180 granted in the past. Stays of 180 days are authorized upon presentation of proof of economic solvency during a visitor's stay in Mexico for that period of time. They may be revalidated at any local office of the Mexican Department of the Interior. If children are included with parents, they must all leave Mexico together, unless prior arrangements are made with the Mexican Department of Immigration. Children traveling with one parent only must have the written, notarized consent from the other parent to travel, and it must be authenticated at a Mexican consulate. Tourist cards are free and may be obtained from Mexican consulates, Mexican tourism offices, Mexican immigration offices at ports of entry, and from most airlines serving Mexico.

Customs Laws

Tourists should enter Mexico with only the items needed for their trip. Entering with large quantities of an item—expensive appliances such as TVs or stereos, or anything else a tourist might not normally be expected to have—may lead to suspicions of smuggling. Do not bring firearms or ammunition into Mexico without prior arrangements through Mexican consular authorities. Be sure that Mexican customs officials check both the firearms and the permit authorizing their entry into the country.

Currency Regulations

The unit of currency is the peso. Currently, 22.8 pesos = US$1. Banks, hotels, or reputable shops can change American dollars or traveler's checks. Mexico permits its peso to float, so it may be beneficial to compare bank and hotel rates before converting any sizable amounts of dollars or traveler's checks. Personal U.S. checks are rarely accepted by Mexican hotels or banks; therefore, bring either cash or traveler's checks with you. Major credit cards are widely accepted in the larger centers if you have sufficient identification.

Health

Smallpox vaccinations are no longer mandatory to enter Mexico. In high altitude areas, such as Mexico City, most people need only a short period of adjustment; others, none at all. Spend the first few days as leisurely as possible, with a lighter than usual diet and a lighter intake of alcoholic beverages, especially at night. Some reaction signs to high altitude are an initial lack of energy, a tendency to tire more easily, shortness of breath, occasional dizziness, and insomnia. Drink only bottled water. All vegetables and fruits eaten raw should be washed and peeled.

Driving To and Through Mexico

Tourists driving to Mexico are allowed to bring their cars into Mexico under a temporary importation permit. These permits are usually issued at border entry points and are valid for the same period of time as tourist permits. To avoid being fined, you must remove your vehicle from Mexico before the car's permit expires. Mexican automobile insurance is sold in most cities and towns on the U.S. side of the border. It should be obtained prior to entering Mexico, since U.S. automobile liability insurance is not valid in Mexico. American motorists who become involved in traffic accidents run the risk of spending time in jail, pending determination of liability and ability to pay any judgment, even if the case is eventually decided in their favor. You may not sell, transfer, or otherwise dispose of a car brought into Mexico under the temporary importation permit, nor leave Mexico without the car. In case of emergencies or accidents where the car becomes inoperable or unrepairable, arrangements to depart Mexico without the car can be made by the owner through the Mexican Federal Registry of Automobiles in Mexico City or through the local office of the Treasury Department (Hacienda). The Embassy or U.S. consulates can assist in such cases. Finally, under no circumstances should the owner of a vehicle allow anyone else to drive it unless the owner is in the vehicle; to do so can result in confiscation of the car and/or a heavy fine.

Operation of Citizen's Band (CB) Equipment in Mexico

American tourists are permitted to operate CB radios in Mexico. A permit valid for 180 days must be obtained from a Mexican consulate or an office of the Mexican National Tourism Council when a valid U.S. citizen's band radio

authorization is presented and upon payment of a nominal fee. These permits are not available at ports of entry. Transmissions on CB equipment are allowed only on channels 9, 10, and 11 and may be used only for personal communication and for emergency road assistance. Any form of linear amplifier or other device which increases the transmission power to over 5 watts is prohibited. CB equipment may not be used near radio installations of the aeronautical and marine services.

Dual Nationality

Traditionally, the United States has not recognized the concept of dual nationality. However, it does acknowledge, as a matter of fact, that some U.S. citizens may also possess other nationalities under the laws of other countries.

Under Mexican law, an individual born in Mexico of American parents or, in many cases, of only one American parent, may acquire both nationalities at birth. Likewise, an American citizen born in the United States of a Mexican father—or after December 26, 1969, of a Mexican mother, has dual national status. A dual national U.S./Mexican citizen must be documented to travel into and out of the United States as an American citizen and must be documented with a Mexican passport to travel into and out of Mexico as a Mexican citizen.

The Mexican Government recognizes dual nationality from birth until age 18. In order to obtain a Mexican passport after age 18 or to benefit from Mexican nationality, e.g., own property in the restricted zone, obtain resident tuition rates at a Mexican University, vote in a Mexican election, etc., dual nationals are required by the Mexican Government to renounce any other nationality they may hold and to swear allegiance to Mexico. This is accomplished by signing an Application for a Certificate of Mexican Nationality, which contains a renunciation clause and an oath of allegiance to Mexico. This form is issued by the Secretariat of Foreign Relations. It should be fully understood that under U.S. law, *signing this application after age 18 may result in loss of U.S. nationality.* It is suggested that prior to obtaining a Certificate of Mexican Citizenship, a dual citizen should consult with the U.S. Embassy or a U.S. consulate in Mexico.

Judicial System and Drugs

The Mexican judicial system is based on Roman and Napoleonic law and does not presume the person accused of a crime to be innocent until proven guilty. Trial under this system is a prolonged process based largely not on confrontation but on documents examined in court on a fixed date by prosecution and defense counsel. There is no trial by jury nor a writ of *habeas corpus* in the Anglo-American sense. Bail exists but is usually not granted to foreigners on the assumption they will depart Mexico. While an individual is guaranteed certain rights under the Mexican Constitution, these rights are subject to interpretation under Mexican judicial procedures, which often differ significantly from U.S. constitutional guarantees and judicial procedures. Americans in Mexico are subject to Mexican law, not U.S. law.

Mexican law considers trafficking and/or possession of proscribed drugs to be a Federal offense. The Mexican Government rigorously prosecutes all drug cases. Since Mexican law does not differentiate between "hard" drugs (e.g., heroin) and "soft" drugs (e.g., marijuana or amphetamines), all offenders are subject to the same prison sentences if found guilty: 7 to 15 years. Additionally, persons being tried on drug charges are not eligible for release on bail during the extended trial process or for parole if found guilty. Therefore, it is not uncommon for persons charged with drug offenses to be detained for periods up to 1 year before a verdict is reached in their case.

Prisoner Transfers

Mexico and the United States have signed and ratified a Treaty on the Execution of Penal Sentences. Under this treaty, qualified nationals of each country arrested and convicted of certain criminal offenses in the other country may be returned to prisons in their respective countries to complete their sentences. The treaty entered into force in 1977, and as of mid-1979, more than 400 Americans and nearly 200 Mexicans had been transferred back to prisons in their respective countries. The treaty does not, as some believe, provide for *trial* in the home country of the accused, nor is it applicable to the following categories of prisoners: (1) those whom the transferring country refuses to transfer or the receiving country refuses to accept; (2) those who have resided 5 or more years in the convicting country before the arrest leading to conviction; (3) those for whom an appeal or application for writ of relief is still pending; (4) those with less than 6 months of their sentences remaining; and (5) those convicted of certain specified offenses, including political and immigration offenses.

Bringing Pets into Mexico

An American visiting Mexico may bring in a dog, cat, or up to four canaries by presenting at the border:

a) a pet health certificate signed by a registered veterinarian in the United States and issued not more than 72 hours before the animal enters Mexico; and

b) a pet vaccination certificate showing that the animal has been treated for rabies, hepatitis, pip, and leptospirosis.

As a courtesy to visitors to Mexico, certification by Mexican consular authorities is not required for the health or vaccination certificates.

A 25-peso fee is charged at the time of entry into Mexico to issue a permit for the animal while it is in Mexico.

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What documentation do I need as a U.S. citizen to visit Mexico for a short period?

Where do I go for a "tourist card"?

Do I need special permission to drive my car into Mexico?

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